

Trees & Storms: Others Have Recovered

Trees are often like good friends-not fully appreciated until they are gone or hurt. So, to anyone who anguished when a favorite tree was severely damaged in the recent storm, here's encouragement from The National Arbor Day Foundation and foresters in other cities: Don't despair-given time, the community's trees can come back.

"Trees are amazingly resilient," says John Rosenow, president of The National Arbor Day Foundation. "It may take several years, but many of the trees damaged by a storm will recover as they grow."

Rosenow also notes that damaged trees may need human assistance in the recovery process. "They need our help and our patience, and they need our care. The experience of other communities has shown that with proper care of damaged trees and planting of new trees to replace those toppled or mortally wounded by a storm, once-devastated neighborhoods can come back."

This was true even in the case of what was the most costly natural disaster in United States history - Hurricane Andrew, which blitzed southern Florida on August 18, 1992. With sustained winds of 145 miles per hour, Andrew left 126,000 homes destroyed or damaged. Economic losses exceeded \$30 billion. Countless trees were uprooted, broken, or stripped of foliage. Many neighborhoods looked like war zones.

In one Miami neighborhood, more than 1,600 homes were destroyed, and photos taken immediately after the storm show most trees down or severely damaged. But five years after Hurricane Andrew, the powers of recovery from both human and tree loss were amazingly evident in follow-up newspaper stories. The homes had been rebuilt, the surviving trees had regrown and were in full leaf, and life had returned to normal. Eliot Kleinberg, writing for the Palm Beach Post, summed up the recovery in his community in these words: "The birds have returned. The trees have grown back. The walls are back up. Unless you look closely, you might never know."

Most damage from severe storms is not as widespread or devastating as that from Hurricane Andrew. But thunderstorms, ice storms, early or late wet snows, or unusually strong winds can cause major damage to trees and property anywhere. In 1987 Cincinnati suffered a devastating ice storm, followed two years later by a freak April storm that dumped 12 inches of snow just as trees were growing spring leaves. Then, in June of 1993 strong winds destroyed 20 percent of a large urban forest and blew down street trees all over Cincinnati.

"It looked like Mount St. Helens had blown up," reported Natural Resources Manager Jenny Gulick. "It laid out all these trees like match sticks."

After the initial recovery and repair of damage, Cincinnati businesses and citizens donated money to help plant 2,000 new trees that fall. Since then, city officials have mounted a comprehensive program of preventive maintenance for street trees. The trees have recovered, and today most people have almost forgotten that the disasters ever occurred.

"The best thing to come out of this was greater citizen awareness of the value of trees and the value of a proactive street maintenance program," Gulick said.